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AUTHOR Ballinger, Mary G.
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ABSTRACT

Academic institutions document their rhetoric through the written communications that show up in faculty mailboxes. Much of what arrives serves to remind faculty of what needs to be done to participate in the events and decision-making processes of the institution. The mail encountered by graduate students also reflects hierarchical power inherent in universities. For example, the letter of acceptance into the doctoral program states that the student's responsibility is to "contribute in an important way to the level of scholarship" at the university. The application form for travel funding forces scholars to attend conferences, thus carrying out the above rsponsibility on shoestring budgets. The consent form for the Ph.D. advisory committee and the scheduling of the doctoral exam also reflect such a bureaucratic tangle. In short, scholars should critique and, when necessary, resist such academic and institutional rhetoric with, at the very least, a call for dialogue and collective action. (Examples of the three forms are appended.) (HB)

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We Get Mail Documenting the Rhetoric of Our Academic Institutions

Mary G. Ballinger

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Presented to

Conference of College Composition and Communication

March 21, 1992

Cincinnati, OH

As my colleagues Mike Blitz and Mark Hurlbert have pointed out earlier in this presentation, our academic institutions document their rhetoric through the written communications that show up in our faculty mailboxes (Blitz and Hurlbert, 1989). Because faculty mailboxes are both "principal thoroughfares for our day to day communication with administrators, colleagues, and students" and "terminals for a great quantity of the institution's textual freight" (Blitz and Hurlbert, 1989, p. 7), much of what arrives serves to remind us of what we need to do to be part of an institutional event, an institutional decision, and/or become a figure in our institution. I would like to extend what has been stated earlier and take another direction. I would like to take this exploration of institutional mail from a graduate student perspective because this perspective has the greatest influence on me.

Although I am considered "faculty," as a teaching associate I understand it is a title "in name only," and that in the hierarchy of institutional life, my title is insignificant. The first significant document that I received from my institution was my acceptance letter. (overhead transparency) I would like to

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draw your attention to one particular sentence in the first paragraph. Please note that there is nothing out of the ordinary in this sentence; this is logically expected of any entering doctoral student. And I must confess that I agreed with it completely when I received this letter. I still agree with it. So in fulfillment of this scholarship requirement, I am here with you today in Cincinnati, participating on this panel with my colleagues.

Now in order for me to be with you today to deliver this paper, I applied for travel funds to cover my expenses. Delivering this paper qualified me for this travel request. (overhead transparency) You will note that submitting this request for travel funds necessitated that I meet time constraints well in advance of this conference. Thus my estimated costs seem rather exhorbitant because (a) I had no roommate at the time and (b) I thought I would drive my own vehicle. After totalling my estimated costs and getting appropriate signatures, I noticed the asterisk and let my eyes wander to its companion. Students were only eligible for funding to a maximum amount that was below my estimated budget. I see. I am to deliver papers on a shoestring budget. When I later received my travel approval, it was for an even half of the designated maximum amount. Okay. I am to deliver papers on a worn shoestring budget.

But enough of this bureaucratic tangle of travel expenses. As I mentioned earlier, I am a doctoral student currently studying for my comprehensive exams; they are scheduled to start in several weeks. Once I finished my coursework and began to talk with my committee

on readings and questions, I was asked "have you filled out your green sheet?" No, I hadn't. I didn't even know what the "green sheet" was. Well, here it is. (overhead transparency) This little sheet of paper, which rates its own color, by the way, is what is absolutely driving me these days. Please note that I have to list in the order of days I wish to take the exams. Here is one day where I can be shot, another where I can be hung, and yet a third for another option. Note that any information on orals--where the complete dismemberment occurs--is relegated to the last paragraph, and within parentheses at that. One entire week of my life is blocked for my comps. Not to mention my life up until then.

As my colleagues have urged, "the monologue of all institutional documents should be critiqued and, when necessary, resisted with, at the very least, a call for dialogue and collective action" (Blitz and Hurlbert, p. 23). That is why we have gathered together today at such an early hour: to critique and to resist, to call for dialogue and collective action as we move through our academic institutions as members and as agents of change. Such heightened awareness can only serve to make the call for dialogue more incessant.

Thank you.

Work Cited

Blitz, M. & Hurlbert, C.M. (1989). Literacy demands and institutional autobiography. Works and Days, 7(1), 7-33.

The Graduate School
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Stright Hall
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1081

(412) [redacted]

IUP

April 30, 1990

Mary Ballinger
[redacted]

Dear Mary:

On behalf of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, I am pleased to announce that you are a recipient of the
. Your selection as a recipient of the fellowship reflects your strong academic credentials and potential for excellence in teaching and research. It is expected you will contribute in an important way to the level of scholarship at IUP. We look forward to meeting you as you begin your program of study.

In addition to the fellowship, you have been nominated for a graduate assistantship.

Information about the fellowship and the graduate assistantship are described below. Please review this information carefully and should you have questions about the fellowship or the graduate assistantship, contact either of the following persons.

The doctoral coordinator in your department -
Acting Associate Dean in the Graduate School -
Stright Hall, IUP 15705

The fellowship award is a $5,000 monetary award and will be disbursed to you in two $2,500 payments; one in September 1990 and the second in January 1991.

The is an award for one academic year (1990-91). As an awardee, you are eligible for the fellowship only for the first year of doctoral study.

The graduate assistantship includes a $5,600 stipend and full tuition waiver. Your graduate assistantship appointment is on a half time basis and requires that you perform an average of 20 hours of service per week over the period of the assistantship appointment. The half-time assistantship appointment requires that you enroll in at least 9 and not more than 12 graduate credits for each semester of the appointment. Fulfillment of the contractual obligations of the half-time graduate assistantship entitles you to a tuition waiver of up to 12 graduate credits in the summer school sessions of the summer immediately following the completion of the graduate assistantship. A letter and

The Graduate School and Research

APPLICATION FORM

STUDENT TRAVEL TO DELIVER PAPERS

1. Name Mary Ballinger
2. Campus Address 110 Leonard Hall
3. Department or Unit English
4. Phone Number 7833
5. Title of Paper We Get Mail Documenting the Rhetoric of Our Academic Institutions
6. Meeting Title Conference on College Composition and Communication
7. Meeting Location Cincinnati, OH
8. Dates of Proposed Travel March 19-21, 1992
9. Is this paper coauthored? This is a panel
10. If yes, please give name of coauthor Proposed by C. Mark Hurlbert
11. Estimated cost:

A. Air transportation	0.00	
B. Ground transportation	168.00	(700 miles)
C. Meeting registration	15.00	
D. Hotel - 2 nights	244.00	
E. Per diem - 72 hours	72.00	
F. TOTAL	499.00	

12. Sources of IUP Funding:

Source	Amount	Authorizing Signature
A. Grant		
B. Department	0-00	
C. College Dean		
D. Provost's Fund in the Graduate School*		
E. TOTAL		

NOTE: Application should be completed and signed through item 12C and delivered to the Associate Dean for Research for processing. Submit at least two months prior to the meeting date. Travel vouchers should be submitted to the department the week after the meeting. In order for the money to be transferred to your department, you must deliver to the Associate Dean for Research a copy of the paper presented at the meeting and a copy of the travel voucher submitted to your department. This must be done within two weeks after the trip takes place.

*Students funded to a maximum of $300.

PH.D. ADVISORY COMMITTEE REQUEST FORM

Candidate's Name_____ Date_____

I would like to request the folowing faculty serve on my Advisory Committee to examine me in the fields listed below (please list in the order of days you wish to take the exams):

1._____ _____
faculty field

2._____ _____
faculty field

3._____ _____
faculty field

I expect to schedule exams in:_____

Please note that the Advisory Committee cannot be appointed until the Director of Graduate Studies in Rhetoric and Linguistics receives an official IUP transcript showing the completion of all course work and requirements for the degree.

This form should be returned to the secretary in the Graduate Office, Leonard 111.

(Please Note: Oral exams will be scheduled on Friday of the exam week unless there are too many examinees to fit in, so plan to be in Indiana for the entire week.)